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On the Multiple Dimensions of Memory in the Oral Communicative Moment

Graham Furniss

THE ORAL COMMUNICATIVE MOMENT

1 A conundrum for those of us who work in the field of oral literature has always been that we look to grasp and analyse the characteristics of that which is manifest in the disappearing, evanescent world of performance. Orality in this sense describes a field of experience that is gone as soon as it is uttered. As Ong put it, 'Sound exists only when it is going out of existence. It is not simply perishable but essentially evanescent... (Ong, 1982: 32). In my book, *Orality: the Power of the Spoken Word* (2004), I have tried to tease out some of the features surrounding orality that make it so potentially powerful and so fascinating. That discussion focuses upon the transience, the potency and the ubiquity of orality and engages with some of the debates about orality and literacy that have rumbled on through many different disciplines and in the study of Africa in particular. Is this pursuit then, like tilting at windmills, an essentially fruitless attempt to grasp the ungraspable? I think not. I do think that approaching performance from the perspective of the delivery and experience of the transient does force us to think about how the performing mind perceives and experiences pattern and how the experiencer ingests those same characteristics of the everflowing utterance. Rubin (1995: 15) quotes Havelock,

> The eye can review, that is retrospect: the ear and mouth cannot. The composer-reciter works steadily forward, and only forward, and the memory that repeats the composition works forward also. This means that what we are tempted to call correspondence or symmetry is really a process of continual anticipation.

2 Working from the oral communicative moment, viewed from the angles both of the producer and of the receiver, it is thus necessary to consider how these two dimensions adumbrated by Havelock operate together – the memory of things gone before, and the

anticipation of that which is to come – as the determining conditions of what is happening now. And running through what is happening now are the moments of recognition of some entity which has previously been perceived or at least some similar entity – everything from a rhythmic beat to a connotation of an image to an utterance by a similar category of person, each occurrence of which may invoke an expectation of more of the same, or similar, to follow. In the discussion that follows I will endeavour to briefly explore some of these features of orality, mindful of the recent injunction from the musicologist Richard Widdess (2008), orality can too easily be seen as a negative condition, a condition of the stereotypical Other, a view that then lends unwelcome support to the Western academy's lingering insistence that only music written in scores is really worth taking seriously. We need to understand what orality *is*, not what it is not.

3 Let me begin with a rather schematic representation of the features that I will be referring to in the ensuing discussion. Clearly, there are a series of contextual features surrounding the event that constitutes the oral communicative moment when 'X spoke':

– Who is this person who spoke?
– Who were they speaking to?
– Who else was listening?
– What were the relations between them?
– To what purpose did they speak and how did the addressee(s) react to that purpose?
– Where did they speak?
– When did they speak?

And there are a range of features surrounding what was said:

– What did they say?
– Is it in a recognizable register/style/genre of language and what are the implications of that?
– To what extent does it deploy the patterns of such genres, or diverge from them?
– Is there an aesthetic and a measure of effectiveness for such ways of speaking?
– How was it generated?
– How is/was it remembered?
– Was the utterance inter-mediated to its audience (speaking through another, recorded and played back) and what are the implications of that distancing?

4 These and other issues arise in considering the experiential moment of a performance, one single event (the definition of event begs many further questions too). The question then arises about the relationship between this one event and a further subsequent event that is in some way connected. How are they connected? How has the second event been generated? How does it compare? Maybe it is the same speaker telling the 'same' story to the same people but this time in satirical anger rather than in praise; maybe it is an oration at a graveside in a different place, by different people saying very different things, to different effect, but still recognisably a lament is being performed; maybe it is a disputably recognizable version of the Odysseus story in a different language, millenia apart, in another country, in film rather than verse, and with a different cast of characters but a metaphorical equivalence of plot sequence; maybe it is as near as dammit an exactly memorised rendition of the same ballad to a new audience. And so it goes on. Starting with the characteristics of the oral communicative moment is one way of approaching the process and practice of

continuity equally as much as of evanescence and impermanence. As Karin Barber (2007) put it,

> Nonetheless, it is clear that what happens in most oral performances is not pure instantaneity, pure evanescence, pure emergence and disappearance into the vanishing moment. The exact contrary is usually the case. There is a performance – but it is a performance of something. Something identifiable is understood to have pre-existed the moment of utterance. Or, alternatively, something is understood to be constituted in utterance which can be abstracted or detached from the immediate context and re-embodied in a future performance. Even if the only place this 'something' can be held to exist is in people's minds or memories, still it is surely distinguishable from immediate, and immediately disappearing, actual utterance. It can be referred to. People may speak of "the story of Sunjata" or "the praises of Dingaan" rather than speaking of a particular narrator's or praise-singer's performance on a particular occasion. And this capacity to be abstracted, to transcend the moment, and to be identified independently of particular instantiations, is the whole point of oral traditions (325).

5 This discussion will look at some of the processes that produce elements of continuity between one event and a subsequent event, and is limited in its current scope to that issue. A broader discussion would need to engage with questions such as are listed above in relation to understanding the listener and speaker experience of the oral communicative moment, and address continuities and ruptures in the range of frames that surround that moment – one set of frames is constituted by the various dimensions of ways of speaking: the norms and expectations that are built into genres of speech, rhetorical styles, and aesthetic and effectiveness criteria; a second set of frames concerns the social, political, religious practices within which the moment and its rhetorical frame is embedded: status distinctions, gender distinctions, class positions, group affiliations, event categories and other contexts (for further discussion see Furniss, 2004).

FROM ONE EVENT TO THE OTHER

6 How best to characterise the process of transition from one event to another? As the quotation from Karin Barber above suggests, it is necessary to postulate the existence of an entity that exists in some way in between the two events, an entity that exists over time, both before and after each of the events, and which can be re-shaped as a consequence of any or all of the events to which it relates. Ruth Finnegan (2007) expresses the notion as follows:

> ...all literary forms are in a way double-sided. They are indeed created in the magic moment of experienced performance, but also enlarged into or rooted in or reverberating with something more abstracted, detachable from the flow, imbued with memories and connotations for its participants which go beyond the immediate moment... performance goes beyond the immediate moment in another way too. Enactments from past and present meet, the intersection of permanence with evanescence. Elin Diamond captures this well in her proposition that 'performance, even in its dazzling physical immediacy, drifts between present and past, presence and absence, consciousness and memory... [and] embeds features of previous performances' (1993: 1). To one degree or another participants in performance are implicated in memories and resonances that both exist in, and go further than, the here and now, evocations beyond the immediate moment (192-5).

7 So what are these "features of previous performances" that facilitate recall, provoke production and embody continuity? In a recent discussion of the generative processes in north Indian music, Richard Widdess outlined the usefulness of a range of similar terms used by cognitive psychologists – schema, scripts, templates:

> As Ong, Rubin and many others observe, oral performance is highly dependent on memory, on repetition, and on structure. Oral poets construct or reconstruct texts in performance, rather than reproducing them verbatim, and they do so with the help of memorised narrative themes, motives, formulas, metre, rhythm and melody. Such remembered structures are familiar to cognitive psychologists who call them variously models, templates, schemas or (paradoxically) scripts, but I shall use the term schema. The equivalent schemas [for the musicians under discussion] would include the melodic mode or rāga, the metrical cycle called tāla, the sequence of non-metrical introduction leading to metrical song, the arched contour of the introduction, the melodic and rhythmic shape of the composed song, the lyrics, techniques of rhythmic manipulation and variation of the song, and for the drummer, the conventional accompaniment pattern specific to this musical metre, and innumerable formulaic phrases and sequences of strokes that can be deployed in any metre. All these structures or schemas are memories, but it is their re-combination at the moment of performance that leads to a different performance every time (8).

8 And he commented further on the anticipatory features of such schemata, a notion that is equally important in the discussion of literary genre:

> One of the functions of a schema is to allow or generate expectations, and part of a performer's art is to induce the listener to have expectations that are then challenged or re-negotiated as the performance unfolds (9).

9 In Widdess's representation of the process, there are summative, encapsulating dimensions to remembered examples (lines, phrases) that trigger the performer's ability to unroll the fuller entity while allowing the creativity of improvisation:

> Here only the short melody with words, introduced by the singer at the point where the drummer starts to play, could be described as "pre-composed". For the rest, both performers rely on melodic and rhythmic formulas that can be infinitely re-combined according to conventions of style and performance practice, the needs of the moment and the imagination of the artist. Indian musicians call this process upaj, "what springs to mind", and Western commentators, for want of a better word, call it "improvisation" (7).

10 In the north Indian tradition there is a practice of written musical notation, and Widdess comments further:

> The written text thus serves as a template or schema for performance. On the other hand, the template is not complete, and depends for its completion on other schemas held in memory. The melodies, metres, pattern of alternation, and accompanying percussion patterns are all transmitted orally, committed to memory, and combined at the moment of performance. This combining or "composition" is a social process: singers often find it difficult to remember the melody or make rhythmic mistakes if you ask them to sing by themselves, but serious mistakes are rare when they sing as a group... In particular, the melodic modes or rāgas are exemplified through memorized compositions and by melodic practice: a rāga is a collection of melodic motives, a melodic route-map that allows too many possible realisations to be completely defined in writing (22).

11 In this context the remembered entity is an extract, a snatch, a cue that triggers knowledge and familiarity with a pattern; the phrase of a few words may contain within it a number of discrete dimensions to a range of patterns: a topic or just a hint at

the memory of a topic, the first bar of a rhythm or even just the hint of the anticipation of a rhythm, the first notes of a tune or even just the hint of a tune to come, the voice style of a character or even just the anticipation of a stereotyped raised eyebrow of a character, and so it goes on. But they may be much more than that: a plot sequence integral and necessary to the story of Sunjata (or at least a minimal set of Sunjata characters and their relationships), or a chorus that is repeated verbatim at regular repeated moments in the performance.

12 The relationship between a written text and an oral performance can, of course, range from mnemonic cue to full written script of all verbalisation in performance (and to include stage directions in the case of much Western theatre) through to a record or recension of the oral performance as past event. Karin Barber (2003) puts it succinctly:

> Written texts can be cues, scripts or stimulants to oral performance, and can also be records, outcomes or by-products of it (324).

13 A major element in the process of establishing a piece of language as something that can be remembered, invoked or referred to is the process of separating it off from the flow of daily discourse, extracting it from the sea of chit chat so that it can be quoted. One way is to embed that piece of language within the array of generic codes that a language has at its disposal – making it fit a rhyme scheme, slotting it into a set of rhythmic patterns that deploy stress or quantity to fix a beat, or making it alliterate, or indeed deploy a register of words that are distinctive and special in that language, among many other ways of marking language. These and other grammatical techniques of nominalisation, ellipsis, removal of deixis, all contribute to making language memorable, a process of "entextualisation" (Bauman and Briggs, 1990) that Karin Barber (2003: 71) characterises as follows:

> While performance theory stressed the emergent moment, "entextualisation" theory focused on the way in which fluid discourse is fixed, and made available for repetition, recreation or "copying" – and thus for transmission over space and perpetuation over time. Bauman and Briggs made a pioneering move in this direction when they referred to entextualisation as "the process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit – a text – that can be lifted out of its interactional setting".
> (Bauman and Briggs, 1990: 73)

14 Once made extractable and re-callable, the text is then quotable in subsequent new and independent events:

> The power of the concept of quotation is that it captures simultaneously the process of detachment and the process of recontextualisation. A quotation is only a quotation when it is inserted into a new context. Thus in the very act of recognizing a stretch of discourse as having an independent existence, the quoter is re-embedding it. This helps us to understand how "text" (the detachable, de-contextualised stretch of discourse) and "performance" (the act of assembling and mobilizing discursive elements) are two sides of one coin, inseparable and mutually constitutive.
> (Barber, 2003: 79)

GENRE

15 Before looking further at the process of recall and memory that builds upon the process of working with cues and clues, it is clear that these mnemonics and the features they capture are building blocks in the establishment of an intermediary entity that links

one performance event and another, namely the notion of 'genre'. Genre is a bundle of features shared between a range of separate individual performances or 'texts', on the basis of which performers and audiences categorise and group events and utterances as being in some way the same, or different. Generic features can range across the full gamut of areas covered by the set of questions adumbrated earlier but more often than not relate to aspects of theme/content, form, performance styles and occasions, and people who do it.

16 For example, in the case of two closely-related genres in Hausa, the oral song (*wakar baka*) and written poetry (*rubutacciyar waka*) traditions (where *waka* as a shared term implies rhythmically patterned language), the two genres are defined in contradistinction to each other covering features of content, form, performance, and social context (for further discussion see Muhammad, 1979).

17 Before commenting briefly on the issue of carry-over from one event to another, it is important to understand the generic boundaries and the distinguishing features that people draw in defining a genre and its practitioners. In this case the inter-generic relations are between what are acknowledged as an oral and a written genre rather than two co-existing oral genres, nevertheless tracing continuities within the event sequence within one oral genre do sometimes require the cross-generic perspectives in order to understand the significance of changes, adaptations, borrowings that occur within a single genre. Change between one event and another can be a blurring of boundaries between one acknowledged parallel genre and another, or may involve an entirely novel departure engendered in new political, social, technological, or ideological circumstances.

18 The two genres of Hausa *waka* are generally defined by practitioners and commentators in terms of contrastive tendencies rather than absolute differences and the definitions are sometimes framed as negative characteristics, in other words defining in terms of *not* doing what other people do, rather than focusing upon positive features of the event or form. This ties the two genres closely together as being in contradistinction, but also makes for a tension as regards the way people make claims for quality, purity, typicality of any particular example in all the variety of form and style that inevitably attend any generic array of exemplification.

19 The range of features that are presented as typifying the two Hausa genres fall into five major categories: performance features, form, thematic content, composition and transmission, and social nexus. While these are the dimensions of contradistinction between genres in the following discussion, they are also the same dimensions in which change and adaptation can take place in the intra-generic movement from one performance event to another.

20 The traditional view (Muhammad, 1979) of performance features has been, in summary form, that while song is typified by musical accompaniment – a wide variety of drums, some of which are associated with particular kinds of song, along with a range of plucked and bowed instruments also, the poetry chanting/recitation tradition has eschewed musical accompaniment almost entirely. While song has been generally performed by groups of singers and musicians under a 'lead' singer, poetry has been typified by the solo recital; while song is largely a public performance sometimes before large audiences, typically poetry has been as much a local and more private recitation (although some political and other poetry has been recited to large audiences in recent decades); and finally, the more obvious contrast that while song is

communicated invariably orally, poetry can be communicated either orally or in writing.

21 In relation to aspects of form, the contrasts between the two genres would appear to be more directly obvious and firm in so far as there are clear forms of patterning that are typical of each genre. Nevertheless, it is clear from the evidence of practitioners themselves that patterns which seem to be exclusive are indeed in fact borrowed across the generic divide more often than is generally accepted. Poetry deploys the rhythmic patterns of classical Arabic metres, some of them, and are analysable in Khalilian terms built around patterns of syllable weight; song on the other hand deploys rhythmic patterns that are woven around drumming and the rhythmic patterns inherent in the sung line. Poetry reinforces the regularity in line length derived from the metrical patterns by the further marking of lines and stanzas through rhyme schemes, often two-line verses, sometimes five-live verses; song makes little or no use of such regularities. However, the song tradition marks boundaries and sections through the extensive deployment of chorus refrains, poetry hardly ever uses a regular refrain. A poem will often be marked by an opening and closing religious doxology, a song will seldom be so marked. One consequence of this "plus" or "minus" frame of reference for a range of features is that a consideration of two performances of the "same song" or of the "same poem" in which a characteristic has changed, may involve a perception that the new version has inappropriately moved in the direction of the "rival" genre – it is not quite a proper poem because it uses a refrain rather than rhyme, or a rhythm that is not metrical. Or, the frame of reference may no longer be the two-part contrast of "is it a poem or is it a song?" but a departure that bucks the whole system – "it has no rhythm at all!" or "it sounds like a song but what is that electronic noise in the background?"

22 In relation to thematic content, it is perhaps difficult to generalise, particularly since both song and poetry have branched out in so many ways on the last decades. Nevertheless, Muhammad (1979) captures a range of themes for song which are built around a difference of social nexus in which practitioners generally operate. On the one hand, the praise-singing tradition, which reaches its apogee in the courts of the old Hausa emirates but which has also been manifest directed at a range of more lowly patrons in the hierarchical structure of "traditional" northern Nigerian society, deploys the nominative tools of hyperbole and metaphor to characterise and typify a target, usually in praise but occasionally in vilification. On the other hand, song is also the mode in which a wide range of populist, humorous sentiments circulate publicly reflecting shared sentiments on the vicissitudes of life at the bottom of a highly stratified society, formerly by status and now by wealth. Hausa poetry derives from the world of Islamic scholarship and the traditions of Islamic religious knowledge, although the range of topics covered in poetry broadened considerably from the early years of the twentieth century to encompass a range of more secular subjects (Furniss, 1996). But the subject-matter of poetic discourse remains typically serious and didactic, with a strong continuing engagement with religious themes.

23 Composition and transmission are contrasted processes (Muhammad, 1979) through the media in which they are embedded. Typically, poetry is composed on paper in either Roman or Arabic script and the business of working within the constraints of metre and rhyme, while perceived through audible or silent recitation, are manageable through the process of writing and re-writing that are available through the pen. Song,

on the other hand, is composed orally; in some cases composition takes place in performance (as claimed by the late, great Mamman Shata) and sometimes through rehearsal and repeat performance. In the latter case, composition can be a group process. While there are some singers who compose individually, individual composition is the norm for poetry. The words of poetry are usually written texts from their inception the recitation of poetry may be recorded and then transmitted on tape, both audio and video. Song is seldom transcribed, other than in academic dissertations, but is everywhere manifest on tape, on radio and on television, on CDs and on the internet.

24 The social nexus within which these two genres operate is difficult to summarise and the changes that have taken place over the last decades are considerable. Traditionally, poetry was a hobby of the educated cleric class, and song was a craft of people of low status. Stardom and wealth have changed something of that distinction. Song was an activity performed for reward in money, clothing, housing and, in the case of the aristocratic courts of the "old" Nigeria, praise-singers were tied as clients to particular patrons where the performance of praise was recompensed on a long-term basis, not simply as payment for a particular performance but as employee – employer (see Ames, 1973; Smith, 1957). Poets on the other hand, generally make a point of indicating that they compose for the good of society and definitely *not* in order to be paid for their services. While some have derived some income from publishers of their works, few have perceived that as a motivation or an outcome. The realities of social status, of social origins, and of forms of recompense, acknowledgement and benefit are immensely complicated in relation to the practice of these two genres, song and poetry. Nevertheless, in terms of the perceptions that singers and poets maintain of the differences between their two genres, there is clearly an intention to create some clear blue water between these two ships sailing in parallel!

25 While I have presented a brief summary of some of the main elements of the contrastive relations between the two genres subsumed in the word *waka* in Hausa, there are majorly significant ways in which, for example, song has been undergoing changes in recent years. I do not have space here to explore these developments, but suffice it to say that there is a whole new wave of "song" that has entirely abandoned the "traditional" array of instrumentation in favour of the synthesiser, has adopted tunes and singing styles from Hindi Bollywood films (see Adamu forthcoming; Larkin, 1997) , has developed the "love" song as an entirely new thematic range, and has populated the world of radio jingles as well as film music in the burgeoning Hausa video film industry (see, for example, Adamu *et al.*, 2004). Sometimes it is difficult to see much element of memory or recall between two events both of which are still called *waka*!

26 In this part of the discussion I have discussed the ways in which two parallel genres "define themselves", through practice and comment, across a range of features adumbrated in the questions outlined at the beginning of this paper: who does it? To whom do they do it? What do they say? How do they say it? To what purpose do they speak? How is it transmitted? – and so on. Each performance is a manifestation of difference and similarity across the generic boundary while it is simultaneously an instantiation in continuity and difference with its own previous generic ancestors – the previous oral communicative moment out of which it has derived through memory and the recalling of generic and specific cues and clues.

> The continuity of concepts embodied in generic features is the essence of the notion of "tradition", and the existence of such continuity provides the basis for the important relationship of expectation (fulfilled or violated) between performer, audience and text. As Karin Barber (2007) puts it:
> Genre is thus the key to the relationship between an individual work and a larger tradition. A work represents its genre, in the sense that the composer/author extrapolates key features of a range of preceding exemplars and uses them as a template in the creation of a new text (43).

27 Reading a novel or listening to an epic is not like data transmission: you do not download the text, but actively apprehend it, configuring its elements in relation to a scheme of expectations and observations as it unfolds, or as you unfold it. Memorising a text is not the opposite of improvising a new one, but in continuity with it. Even rigorously exact memorization – whether of an oral text or a written one – proceeds by reconstructing the whole from salient cues ad recurrent patterns, not by replicating all its elements through a neutral, even, undifferentiated copying process... the impulse to fix words and make them stick runs hand in hand with improvisation and innovation. On the one hand, every attempt at repetition is a recreation from remembered cues and clues, taking place in a new context which imparts a new meaning. On the other hand, even the most dazzling of innovations depends on a framework of memory and expectation; it has to have something to depart from. This is why genre is such a crucial concept in the history and anthropology of texts: genre is both an assemblage of conventions drawn from past instantiations, and a set of parameters within which new creation can take place. A sense of the attributes of a genre is simultaneously a memory and a promise (210-11).

28 However, the notion that the genre provides a template for performances in some mechanical way is belied by the mutual effect of adaptation and change evident between instantiation and template. Karin Barber again:

> Most theories of genre agree, however, that every instantiation of a genre is in some senses (though often to a very limited degree) new. Every text is produced in a specific context, and "emergent elements of here-and-now contextualisation inevitably enter into the discursive process", influencing the way in which the generic framework is used and "opening the way to generic reconfiguration and change" (Bauman, 2004: 7). Genre conventions undergo constant, if microscopic, mutations every time the genre is instantiated in a new work (Fowler, 1982)... Thus "tradition" is continually consolidated through a series of departures from what already exists (43-4).

MEMORY AND RECALL

29 So what is it that is carried from one instantiation to another, one event to another, changed or left unchanged, and in particular what is it that facilitates carry-over and recall? One approach is to consider what cognitive psychology tells us about general processes of memory and recall, and here I rely upon the interesting volume by David Rubin, entitled *Memory in Oral Traditions: the Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads, and Counting-Out Rhymes* (1995). In the remainder of the discussion here I will leave aside the broader consideration of carry-over or disjuncture in the many dimensions of context – the who, when, why, and where of two related events, and focus down upon the 'what' – features of the entextualised entity that is itself recognisable in some way as the same or similar between one event and the other. Rubin sees an immediate

equation between two central concepts in the two disciplines he straddles, psychology and literary theory:

30 What is being transmitted is the theme of the song, its imagery, its poetics, and some specific details. A verbatim text is not being transmitted, but instead an organized set of rules or constraints that are set by the piece and its tradition. In literary terms, this claim makes the structure of the genre central to the production of the piece. In psychological terms, this claim is an argument for schemas that involve imagery and poetics as well as meaning (7).

31 It is genre (or schema) which provides patterns and expectations of pattern that he sees in terms of constraint. There are two complementary dynamic characteristics of pattern. On the one hand patterning can be seen as a limiting process, a restriction on free choice, and this is the dimension that Rubin focuses upon in the quote above; on the other, pattern is a generative mechanism, a necessary framework for creativity and cultural productivity, precisely because it has a forward momentum upon which expectation (whether fulfilled or thwarted) has to be based. Chaos contains no tension since it can bear no expectation, only the fruitless search for interpretable connection. Rubin is interested in the cues and clues that generate a recognisable text in performance and how memory is triggered in that generative process, and he posits a mutually reinforcing array of constraints that strengthen memorability and increase the likelihood of stability in the movement from one event to another: "Multiple constraints decrease choices and increase cues, thereby increasing stability in transmission." (119) The mutually reinforcing function of multiple constraints he illustrates in these terms:

32 The different forms of constraint – such as theme, associative meaning, spatial and object imagery, rhythm and poetic devices – each have different time courses and other properties, making the contribution of each form of constraint especially effective in certain situations. This makes the set of multiple constraints more flexible. In addition, many of the multiple constraints reinforce one another. For example, the rhythm makes the rhyme clearer, and rhyme often marks the end of the line, making the rhythm clearer (305).

33 The first of the constraints he specifies in the above quote, 'theme' is not simply the content of the text under consideration in some general sense, but the structuring frameworks that are inherent in narrativity and in other forms of discourse. Typically, these would be represented in the event sequencing of a narrative along a timeline, or a spatial sequencing of action or focus, or indeed in the patterns of causal relationships, or in the logic of speech and response, or emotion and reaction. He expresses the notion in the following terms, linking it to a range of chains of connection as "scripts":

34 An individual action in a script usually cannot be performed until the actions prior to it have been performed and usually must be performed before actions that follow it. If the script is understood by all members of an audience, each action need not be stated explicitly; nonetheless, the actions enable and are enabled by one another. In oral traditions, this causal linking of events is usually present, and serves to preserve the temporal order of events in the theme and usually the actual order of the presentation of the events in the piece itself... Usually scripts are components of larger structures such as stories. Thus... classicists have long noted short sequences of events that are part of longer stories, sequences that psychologists would call scripts (25).

35 Rubin's further specification of types of constraint as associative meaning and imagery moves his framework into the highly generative world of connotation and free play of thought that can be provoked and invoked, as well as the constraining world of normative association and typical implication upon which he focuses. The poetic devices to which he refers are represented, as far as he is concerned, most directly by patterning in sound:

> ... imagery has many strengths as a way of increasing the memorability of an oral tradition. Imagery is one of our most powerful mnemonic aids. It is especially useful where the rapid retrieval of information is important, as it is in singing to a fixed rhythm, and where the spatial layout and interacting components of a scene offer additional forms of organization (62)... Meaning, imagery and sound have been considered as the three main classes of constraints in oral traditions. All three provide forms of organization that cue recall and limit choices, and all three accomplish this in different ways. Repeating patterns of sound in the form of rhyme and alliteration cue memory more broadly and in less time than either imagery or meaning. The temporal patterns of sound in the form of rhythm organize whole songs in relatively simple ways, while they restrict the individual words and phrases that can appear (88).

36 The precise ways in which recall works in relation to these dimensions of constraint are, again, matters where Rubin sees the experimental work of cognitive psychologists as being revealing and he provides numerous examples of experimental data from that discipline in addressing the specifics of how memory works in oral tradition. It is too large and varied a body of work to summarise here, but Rubin argues for a focus on the productive process rather than the product itself:

37 A theory was proposed for recall in oral traditions. Recall starts with the first word of the song and proceeds in a linear fashion. Words sung are cues for words yet to be sung. If words are to be recalled, they must be discriminated from other words in memory. The general constraints of the genre and the piece, especially rhythm, act as cues from the start, with the singing filling in other cues as it progresses. A piece fitting the constraints of the genre results, not necessarily a verbatim reproduction of a piece reproduced earlier. Where the constraints are strong, they will limit variation without the help of particular cue-item associations formed when a piece was heard. Where only one variant has been heard, especially when it has been heard repeatedly using spaced practice, individual cue-item associations will be more important and will further decrease variation. This process, after the initial, often conscious decision to sing a song has been made, can go on without conscious intervention, using what has been called implicit or indirect memory. The serial-recall method, however, means that knowledge in oral traditions is not routinely accessed without the cues provided by a running start and often cannot be accessed without them. Thus questions about the contents of a piece can often be answered only after the piece has been sung (192).

38 And in conclusion, Rubin returns to the importance of genre/schema in the generative process:

> Not only the song, but also the genre to which the song belongs, are important sources of constraints that become active as the song is sung. The genre establishes the expected constraints, or forms of organization, common to all songs in the genre. It fixes the general patterns, leaving only the specifics of the song to be selected. The term genre in oral tradition is analogous to the term schema in cognitive psychology. The specific variant of the song is an instantiation of the schema. Lord's (1960) concept of multiformity is the set of instantiations that can fit

> one schema or part of a schema. The genre provides general cues for recall and limits the available recalls to those that fit its pattern (304).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

39 For the purposes of discussion this paper has presented the notion of a single performance, an "oral communicative moment" as a phenomenon within which it is possible to identify concurrent features of meaning and social action, and then it explored the continuities in comparing it with another such, subsequent, moment to which it is in one way or another related. The world is of course never that simple. While it may useful to isolate two events in order to examine the "transition" between them, in reality we are faced with a boiling sea of ebb and flow where multiple relations of continuity and rupture are embedded not only in rather more simple instances of separate recensions of "the same story", but also in instances of mockery, pastiche, subversion and counter-discourse. However, tracing the ebb and flow of influence and innovation often does come down in "close reading" to the details of individual features in relationships between minimal pairs.

40 I have concentrated here upon the live, evanescent, performance. But it is clearly the case that such oral performances are "captured" in an increasingly more sophisticated and malleable set of media – tape, film, internet, video, and each one has its own set of implications about storage, range of features abstracted, audiences, interpretative processes, durability and commodification. My focus on the "inter" of the transition from one performance to another would need to be overlaid with a discussion of inter-"mediality" and all that that implies.

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ABSTRACTS

The evanescent oral communicative moment captures instantiations of pre- and post-event continuities of content, style and genre. Between one moment and another, two separate performances of the ‘same thing’, this paper explores what it is that aids recall, provokes production and evokes continuity. It considers insights from the musicology of north India and traditions of practice there, it discusses generic continuities and disjuncture in the Hausa poetic traditions of northern Nigeria, and draws on work in cognitive psychology relating to oral performative forms in the West. The paper proposes an approach to the complex ebb and flow of influence and cultural creativity that starts from considering the detailed dynamics of memory and recall and the range of continuities embedded in separate performances.

L’instant évanescent de la communication orale saisit des exemples de continuités stylistiques, de genre et de contenu, antérieures ou postérieures à l’événement même. Entre un moment et un autre, deux actualisations distinctes de la « même chose », cet article explore ce qui aide la remémoration, suscite la production et évoque la continuité. Il examine pour cela des fragments tirés de la musicologie et des traditions de pratiques en Inde du Nord, les continuités et les disjonctions de genre dans les traditions poétiques haoussa du nord du Nigeria, et s’appuie sur les travaux en psychologie cognitive relatifs aux formes orales performées en Occident. L’article propose une approche du flux et du reflux de l’influence et de la créativité culturelle initiée à partir de l’examen détaillé de la dynamique de la mémoire et le rappel et de la gamme des continuités ancrées dans des performances distinctes.

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